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Dismantle Corporate Power and End Impunity

Philippine groups express solidarity to people of El Salvador in fight against mining giant Oceana Gold/Pacific Rim Mining Corporation

Alyansa Tigil Mina (Alliance against Mining-Philippines), Lilak (Purple Action for Indigenous Women's Rights), Focus on the Global South and the EU-ASEAN FTA Campaign Network denounce the bullying of El Salvador by corporate mining giant Oceana Gold/Pacific Rim. We stand in solidarity with the people of El Salvador struggling to push back the large-scale plunder of their gold and natural resources perpetrated by mining corporations.

The 'David versus Goliath' nature of this continuing battle between communities and the government against mining corporations in El Salvador is clearly evident in the on-going investment case filed by Pacific Rim Cayman LLC against the Republic of El Salvador under the World Bank's International Center for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID).

Pacific Rim a Canadian transnational mining company has sued El Salvador for \$301 million over the government's denial of environmental permit and mining exploitation concession to its El Dorado gold project back in 2004 (ICSID Case No. ARB/09/12). The claim is a staggering amount especially to a poor country like El Salvador. The compensation demanded by Pacific Rim against El Salvador represents around 42% of government spending in 2009, the year the case was filed in ICSID.

This case is part of the long-drawn aggressive effort waged by Pacific Rim to overturn El Salvador's mining laws to conform to its application for concession and it represents a clear assault against democratic governance in El Salvador.

The entry into the picture of Australian mining giant Oceana Gold, which acquired Pacific Rim in 2013 has brought this issue closer to groups and communities struggling against Oceana Gold and large scale mining in the Philippines.

We echo the concerns raised by the people of El Salvador against the operations of Oceana Gold/Pacific Rim Mining Corporation. Like them communities in the Philippines have experienced the devastating impacts on water supplies, the health impacts among miners and mining communities, the increasing conflict, killing of activists and human rights abuses.

Oceana Gold's record in the Philippines

The case of Oceana Gold Philippines Inc. (OGPI), a 100% owned subsidiary of Oceana Gold, in Didipio, Nueva Vizcaya underscores the company's track record when it comes to social and environmental issues as well as conflicts and human rights abuses.

OGPI's 17,626-hectares project has displaced and continues to affect the lives of indigenous communities. The residents of Didipio resist large-scale mining in their area on account of the adverse economic and environmental impacts of mining activities to their community.

OGPI's project has been given priority rights over water—three rivers, springs and other bodies of water are diverted for mine use. This takes away water for communities' household use and for agriculture.¹ Additionally, the mine is situated in the head water of the Rio Grande de Cagayam, one of the major rivers that supply water to the North East Philippines.

This is on top of the string of human rights violations that continue to hound the affected communities. The Commission on Human Rights (CHR) in the Philippines issued Resolution No. A2011-004, January 2011, outlining the violations by OGPI during the project's exploration phase, including the violation of indigenous peoples' rights to residence, adequate housing and property, security of person and right to freedom of movement, and the "right of the indigenous people to manifest their culture and identity."

To date three lives have already been sacrificed due to the conflict. This is due to conflicting interest over land and peace and order problem in the barangay. The current struggle of the communities against Oceana Gold is their planned expansion of their mining operations to cover another 3,000 hectares, including prime agricultural lands and river tributaries.

Solidarity

The communities and movements campaigning against large-scale mining in the Philippines stands in solidarity with the people of El Salvador in their continuing fight against Oceana Gold/Pacific Rim and their struggle for a better life for all.

The all too aggressive push by corporations to get what they want at all costs—to the environment, to peoples' rights and welfare, to national sovereignty, is a blatant display of corporate abuse of power operating within an architecture of impunity that characterize the global trade and investment regime.

The gold mining cases against El Salvador should also be a wake up call to the Philippine government of the dangers of investment rules that give corporations the power to sue governments thereby putting corporate rights premium over regulations and policies of public interest.

There is a growing broad multi-sectoral movement in El Salvador campaigning to keep the country's gold and other mineral resources on the ground amidst the relentless push by mining corporations to extract and profit from these resources.

We are in solidarity with the El Salvador movements in their continuing struggle against mining. We are committed to advance the same struggle in the Philippines as part of our broader fight to dismantle corporate power and end impunity!

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¹ Additional note: The community asserts that the mining project will divert at least 3.84 billion liters of freshwater every year, for the next ten years, for their mining operation to produce 120,000 ounces of gold and 15,000 tons of copper concentrate per year. This amount of water is already sufficient to produce 1,538.592 tons of rice. (Source, ATM case study)